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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 27, 2005

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Arsenic, lead, pesticides found in C&DD landfills

Government data undercuts industry claims that waste is inert

(Columbus, OH)—An Ohio EPA analysis released today confirmed the presence of dozens of toxic chemicals among leachate samples collected from nine construction and demolition debris landfills in eastern and southern Ohio, including dangerously high levels of arsenic and lead.

But under current state rules, regular sampling for most of the chemicals uncovered in the EPA analysis is not required at the 69 C&DD landfills currently licensed to operate in Ohio.

According to the analysis:

-The average level of arsenic, lead, sulfate, iron and manganese found in the nine landfills' leachate exceeded state safe drinking water standards for each chemical.

-Average concentration levels for several toxic chemicals far exceeded average background levels normally found in Ohio groundwater, including levels as high as:

- 36 times the average background level of arsenic
- 14 times the average background level of lead
- 61 times average background level of cadmium
- 87 times the average background level of ammonia nitrogen

-Many compounds not expected to occur in uncontaminated groundwater showed up among the samples, including 34 volatile and semi-volatile organic compounds and six pesticides.

The analysis is based on 15 samples of landfill leachate collected over the past three years from nine C&DD landfills operating under the EPA's oversight, including several landfills that have been the subject of enforcement action regarding the unlawful acceptance of solid waste and/or unidentifiable pulverized waste. Leachate is the liquid that leaches and percolates downward through a landfill after rainwater and any other liquids present make contact with waste placed in the landfill.

The nine sampled landfills are: A&L Salvage Landfill (Columbiana Co.), Athens-Hocking Demolition Landfill (Athens Co.), Cuyahoga Regional Landfill (Cuyahoga Co.), Exit C&DD Landfill (Stark Co.), Iron Valley C&DD Landfill (Lawrence Co.), LAS C&DD Landfill (Trumbull), Mount Easton C&DD Landfill (Wayne Co.), Sidwell C&DD Landfill (Washington Co.), Warren Recycling C&DD Landfill (Mahoning Co.).

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The Ohio EPA compiled the analysis for the legislature's Construction Demolition Debris Study Council, which had asked the agency for any data indicating the presence of hazardous chemicals in construction and demolition debris landfills in Ohio. The legislative panel is charged with issuing a report and recommendations by the end of the month to the General Assembly for strengthening Ohio's C&DD waste disposal laws.

Under current state rules (O.A.C. Sec. 3745-400-10), C&DD landfill operators are required to test groundwater quality for the presence of 64 different parameters, including several dangerous chemicals, only during the first year of operation. Thereafter, the law requires the testing for only 19 parameters, which includes few dangerous chemicals. Solid waste landfill operators must test more frequently for the presence of a more extensive list of chemicals.

Ohio law places fewer controls over the disposal of waste from construction and demolition sites than over municipal solid waste. Unlike solid waste, C&DD waste may be disposed of in landfills with no protective liners and minimal leachate monitoring and siting criteria.

State officials have testified about increasing concerns over C&DD landfill operations in Ohio, including the improper acceptance of solid waste, persistent fires, odor complaints and hydrogen sulfide production, improper handling of asbestos materials, and acceptance of material that is not recognizable as construction and demolition debris. According to the Ohio EPA, the source of most unrecognizable waste is from out of state, especially New York and other East Coast states.

Industry officials have long contended that construction and demolition debris is inert and poses no risk to groundwater or the environment. During a meeting of the study panel two weeks ago, an attorney representing C&DD landfill operators stated that there is no scientific justification for stronger regulation of C&DD waste in Ohio.

According to state estimates, Ohio accepts more out-of-state C&DD waste than out-of-state solid waste. State officials have testified in the past that Ohio is an attractive target for out-of-state shipments of C&DD waste, because of low disposal rates and ample capacity at the 69 C&DD landfills currently licensed to operate in Ohio and because of the state's excellent transportation network of rail lines and highways.

"This data seriously undermines the industry's claim that there is no scientific evidence to support stronger controls on construction and demolition waste," said Jack Shaner, public affairs director for the Ohio Environmental Council.

"It defies logic to think that you can heap arsenic-treated wood, vinyl siding, lead flashing and mercury-laced fluorescent lights, switches and thermostats in a landfill and not need to build in strong environmental controls. The General Assembly should recognize this waste for what it is and regulate it accordingly: mixed solid waste."

The Ohio EPA analysis and the limited list of chemicals for which Ohio law requires C&DD landfill operators to test is available http://www.theoec.org/hottopics_pressroom.html.

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The Ohio Environmental Council (<http://www.theoec.org/>) is a network of more than 100 state and local groups that advocates for clean air and water and natural resource protection.